

### African Studies, Europe and Africa

Lonsdale, John

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lonsdale, J. (2005). African Studies, Europe and Africa. *Afrika Spectrum*, 40(3), 377-402. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-104730>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

John Lonsdale

## African Studies, Europe & Africa<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Why do most Europeans see 'Africa' as feckless victim and 'the West' as a rescue service? How far are Africanists responsible for this misperception? How are you/we to see to it that the EU and G8 act on the Commission for Africa's generally sound proposals? How far can we look to our predecessors for lessons in how to urge, not that Europe 'does something', but that Africans be allowed a better chance to help themselves? How far might our own analyses of Africans' societies, economies and politics be better adapted to exploring how far African agency might combat local and global structures of inequality, injustice, and misrule? How best, finally, can we help our African academic colleagues to become sources of constructive internal criticism?

### **Keywords**

*Africa, underdevelopment, development potential, development theory, African studies, academics/researchers, European perceptions of foreigners, formation of consciousness*

## The Problem

On Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May 1959, half a century ago, Iain Macleod, then Minister of Labour in a British Conservative government, wrote privately to his Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. A general election was coming. The outcome was uncertain. It was also a bad time for British rule in Africa. Eleven Kenyans had been clubbed to death at Hola detention camp. They had refused to do the forced labour that was designed to reclaim them from their 'hard core' allegiance to the Mau Mau rebellion. There was also a state of emergency in Nyasaland, now Malawi. More Africans had been killed there, this time by police gunfire. In a long letter on how Britain might best respond

---

1 Revised version of the Plenary Lecture given to the AEGIS conference on African Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

to such imperial crises there was, for scholars, one particularly arresting sentence. Looking forward to the election, Macleod wrote:

'Black Africa remains perhaps our most difficult problem so far as relationships with the vital middle voters is [sic] concerned. It is the only one in which our policies are under severe criticism and for example the only one on which we are regularly defeated at the universities. 'Indeed the universities feel more strongly on this issue than on any other single matter.'<sup>2</sup>

Imagine, British universities then felt more strongly about Africa than about academic salaries or levels of state funding! To have been an Africanist at that time must have been very heaven. The pity of it of course was that there were very few of us, mostly linguists, anthropologists, medical experts, agricultural and veterinary scientists. The *Journal of African History* and *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, brave trumpeters of a seemingly new field of scholarship, started only in the following year, the 'year of Africa', 1960. So the strength of University feeling must have reflected a general sense of political obligation to Africa among Britain's middle classes. There was also a widespread perception that Africans were now a political force to be reckoned with. They had to be heard. University audiences were electrified by the African leaders who jetted into London to negotiate the terms of their independence. I can remember when Tom Mboya held Cambridge students spellbound for over an hour. Press cartoons portrayed Africans, not as starving children or emaciated victims of HIV-AIDS, but as virile nationalist giants, overshadowing puny British politicians. The press could also accuse ministers of ruining Britain's good name in Africa by reason of their cowardice or folly.<sup>3</sup> The same must have been true in France and Belgium—but not of course in Spain or Portugal, at that time dictatorships not only in Africa but also at home.

Africa has changed since then. So too has Europe. Fifty years ago European electorates felt they had responsibilities towards Africa. Africans were their colonial subjects. Africans were also demanding responsibility for themselves. European publics listened. They knew the names of African leaders: Leopold Senghor, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Zik. One of the leaders of Mediterranean Africa, Gamel Abdul Nasser, had recently humiliated both France and Britain in the 'Suez' fiasco. Had European publics been more ignorant, Macleod would have been less worried. It was a time of hope for Africa and Africans, perhaps of unrealistic expectations. The world expected Africans to use their energetic new

---

2 Macleod to Macmillan, 25 May 1959: The National Archives/Public Record Office (Kew): PREM.11/2583. Emphasis added.

3 Joanna Lewis, "'Daddy wouldn't buy me a Mau Mau": The British Popular Press & the Demoralization of Empire', chapter 10 in Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale (eds.), *Mau Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration* (Oxford, Nairobi & Athens OH: Currey, EAEP & Ohio University Press, 2003), 245, 238.

sovereignties to slay the dragons of poverty, ignorance and disease. Some African leaders took up the challenge by adopting the slogan 'Freedom and Work'.

And now? Which minister would warn his Prime Minister or Chancellor, Rasmussen, Balkenende, or de Villepin, Schröder, Zapatero, Berlusconi, or even Blair—that the outcome of the next election hung on what they did or did not do about Africa? How many Europeans care what Africans think? How much obligation do they feel towards Africans today? My continental colleagues tell me that most of their compatriots feel little or none. A few may hope that aid will deter African immigrants from scaling the walls of Fortress Europe. Others are moved to compassion by televised scenes of famine, but perhaps fewer than twenty years ago.<sup>4</sup> How far are we—scholars, students, presumably friends of Africa—to blame for this mix of everyday indifference and latent fear, tempered now and again by pity? What can we do to repair our failures in representation? Might it be to do what best serves our own professional interest? (But then the Irishman George Bernard Shaw thought the English unsurpassed at describing self-interest as principle). Might we not do best to summon up African colleagues as allies in subverting the European imagination? Ought we not to try to repair the failures in African higher education that so diminish the African ability to speak to us as intellectual equals, as expert witnesses in their own cause, as full citizens of our one world, able to keep us spellbound?

How many Europeans today could name any Africans, apart from the bogeyman Mugabe at one extreme and the twin saints at the other, Mandela and Tutu? How many less exceptional African leaders attract attention even when, as now, our media—and we must be grateful to them—overflow with African stories, prompted by the G8 conference at Gleneagles? How many Europeans expect Africans to solve their own problems? Has any newspaper reported how Africans themselves argue about political and social issues, as they do, generally with more commitment than European electorates at home? Why do we need celebrities to enlist our attention? Bob Geldof and Bono seem almost alone—by popular accounts—to have awoken Europe's conscience to the plight of Africa. What they have done is marvellous, and we should, shamefacedly, applaud them. They have done so much more than we, many hundreds of European Africanists, have done. And the Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, formerly Master of my College, tells me Geldof proved to be a sharp student of development economics in the telephone tutorials Sen gave last year at the popstar's request. Economics is a mystery to

---

4 I am grateful to Jean-François Bayart, Inge Brinkman, Dominique Darbon, Kurt Dohnert, Bodil Folke Frederiksen and Peter Pels for their views. My British colleagues Dave Anderson and Richard Waller got me started while Derek Peterson suggested a final polish.

too many academics as well. But there are also dangers in this celebrityisation of Africa's needs, as you do not need to be told. Two certainly:

One is that the sense of guilt that Geldof and Bono arouse in their audiences may prove, like other emotions, to be but a flash in the pan as the popular attention is caught elsewhere. But the G8 and EU need to be subjected to intellectually sustained and politically creative scrutiny if their governments, and their partner governments in Africa, are to be kept to their word in the long years to come, if Africans are to be given another chance to help themselves, as they were in the 1960s.

The other danger was captured by the *Glasgow Herald's* recent portrayal of Geldof as a medieval knight, a foul-mouthed Don Quixote on a white horse, riding across a stained-glass windowpane.<sup>5</sup> This picture of the secular saint flatters the self-regarding, even racist, European image of ourselves as the heroic dragon-slayer, riding to the rescue of a voiceless African continent, helpless in the face of poverty, ignorance and disease. Why did Geldof not include African singers in his Live8 concerts from the start?<sup>6</sup> Why did the BBC segregate its broadcast of the African groups' performance in the highbrow ghetto of Radio Three? Why is it supposed that Africans can contribute so little in their own cause?

This is only the latest chapter in a long history of the mirror-construction of our two 'racial' identities, European and African. This began at least two centuries ago, during the struggle for the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. The slogan of the Quaker abolitionists, coined in 1787, just before the French revolution, was 'Am I not a man and a brother?' But the African slave into whose mouth this revolutionary question was placed was himself shown, on the Anti-Slavery Society's seal, down on his knees before his white audience, not on his feet. Four years later black slaves were very much on their feet, musket in hand, following Toussaint l'Ouverture in their Haitian rebellion. So too today the popular press—in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, to judge again by my colleagues' comments—has constructed Africa as the hopeless, because *history-less* and therefore immature 'other', dark antipodes to the adult, purposeful West with its *history* of struggle for civilisation.<sup>7</sup> The occasion for the resumption of this image, after the hopeful picture painted by African nationalism, appears to have been the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s, when the (London) *Sun* called secessionist Biafra 'the Land of No Hope'. The self-righteously civilising mission of the past two centuries has thus revived in a post-colonial age. Parachute journalists—so different from

---

5 Thanks to my colleague Sara Dorman for drawing this to my attention.

6 Among many press protests see, for example, Andy Kershaw, 'Africans not included' *The Independent* (4 June 2005), 12-13.

7 Compare Basil Davidson, *Old Africa Rediscovered* (London: Gollancz, 1964), 20-21.

the 'old Africa hands' Colin Legum or Basil Davidson of an earlier age, or Richard Dowden more recently—accompany sometimes equally transient aid-givers into what they can understand only as a tribal, lawless, starving Africa, from Somalia and Rwanda ten years ago, to Darfur and the Congo today.<sup>8</sup> This populist version of the civilising mission infantilises not only Africans, unable to fend for themselves, but Europeans too. We are encouraged to demand, like children, the instant gratification of self-importance, a narcissistic personality disorder. We should, instead, be urged to face up to the long, complex, often dispiriting negotiation of critical solidarity with people who demand that their own views be heard.<sup>9</sup>

Africanist scholars should surely welcome that more arduous task. After all, we study Africans as adults like ourselves, people on their feet, like ourselves, striving to pit their human agency against human structures, whether political, economic, or cultural. Are we content that the people we know as helpfully expert colleagues, often as lifelong friends whose children have played with our children, as our generous hosts, our genial drinking companions, our trustworthy informants or research assistants, our former students who devotedly struggle to maintain their professional, self-discipline, integrity under the twin oppressions of poverty and tyranny—are we content that they be portrayed as helpless victims, not only on their knees but also denied the voice in which to ask if they are not our brothers and sisters? And if we are not content, what then can we, as mere scholars, do about it? What is in our capacity to do? And what is it legitimate for us to try to do? These are not easy questions. And I'm not sure I can answer. But at the end I shall try.

## Then and Now

In many ways the task of enlightenment that falls to us Africanists is less easy than it was for our predecessors of fifty and more years ago. Indeed, perhaps in one sense only has it become easier, in that the pop stars have created for us an enormous audience for news of Africa, if one that may have little patience with the hesitantly complex discussion that is the stock-in-trade of academics.<sup>10</sup> We must learn to engage with that audience—dare I say, try to edu-

---

8 Katy Long, 'The Power of Ignorance: the British media and the construction of hopeless Africa, 1964-1994' (University of Cambridge MPhil in International Studies, 2005).

9 As pointed out to me by my former student, Madeleine Bunting, now of *The Guardian*, in telephone conversation. See also Adrian Hamilton, 'The G8's Africa initiative has failed already', in *The Independent* (30 June 2005), 29.

10 See the know-nothing outburst, 'Let us rebel against poisonous academics and their preposterous claptrap of exclusion', from the normally sophisticated Robert Fisk in *The Independent* (14 May 2005), 31, in which he railed against such necessary technicalities as 'matri-

cate it. Political pop was, I believe, largely a product of the US civil rights movement and the Vietnam war, both of which broke in upon the European consciousness after the issue of African freedom had been more or less settled. In 1959, the year of Macleod's African nightmare, the best European singer, to my mind, *à mon avis*, was Georges Brassens, *chansonnier* and poet. His most productive year had been 1957, two years earlier, with seventeen new songs in a lifetime total of over 160. He had a wickedly political sense of the absurd hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. He ridiculed *les trois capitaines*, too proud to appreciate *la pauvre Hélène*; scorned *les braves gens* who feared those who deviated from the path of middle-class respectability to follow *une autre route qu'eux*. His disreputability was exhilarating to the youngster I was then. Nonetheless, Brassens had none of the anger against geo-political injustice that inspires some popular music today. When his songs were sad it was not because of Africa but for his lost love. If I could paraphrase 'Les Lilas', written in 1957, 'quand ses chansons chantaient tristes, ce n'était pas à cause des tristes tropiques, mais que l'amour n'était pas là.' . . .<sup>11</sup>

Otherwise—apart from the politicisation of pop, a two-edged sword—the times have moved against us. Above all, freedom fighters have become, too often, the lords of misrule. One has only to think of the transmutation of Mugabe<sup>12</sup> or, from an earlier era, Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, or Haile Selassie.<sup>13</sup> Where are our local heroes today, the allies whose cause we could champion, like that of the South African National Congress in the 1980s? Africa's women have the best claim to that title. In the press the stories of their endurance evoke our wonder and admiration, so much tougher-minded than we. But they are more victim than ally.<sup>14</sup> More generally, Africans and their friends have become disillusioned with the fruits of freedom, either stony and pitiless as in the Sudan and Zimbabwe, or shrivelled into nothing as in Somalia, or utterly corrupted, as in the Congo. We are not sufficiently alert—a point to which I shall return—to the fact that many African states are not entirely incapable of delivering the public goods of societal renewal, as in Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Botswana or South Africa—if

---

lineal' as well as, more justifiably, against such jargon as 'dialogic injuries' or 'cognitive constructs'.

11 Georges Brassens (ed. Pierre Saka), *Les Chansons d'abord* (Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1993).

12 But for Mugabe as heroic class warrior see, John L. Moore, *Zimbabwe's Fight to the Finish: The Catalyst of the Free Market* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003).

13 It was a rare African nationalist who in the European imagination went, like Jomo Kenyatta, from villain to statesman.

14 It is striking how soon the western media lost interest in Kenya's Wangari Maathai, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her environmental activism.

only they permitted the affordable means to tackle the social cancer of HIV-AIDS.

To return to the contrasts between then and now: As students, then, we were able to *read* African leaders—Nyerere, Fanon, Mboya, Senghor—and to learn about Africa in wonderfully cheap books such the Penguin Specials, or the Penguin African Library with over twenty titles selling at less than 10?? (£0.50p), often written by cosmopolitan journalists with long African experience, such as the Canadian Patrick Keatley of the *Manchester Guardian*, the South African Brian Bunting of the *Rand Daily Mail* and (Johannesburg) *Guardian*, and Jack Halpern, born in Berlin, editor of the *Central African Examiner*.<sup>15</sup> African novelists also appeared in the equally cheap Heinemann's African Writers Series, which Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* started off in 1962. But I want to say more of a lesser-known series. It addressed both European and African students. Its authors were often white expatriates, deeply involved in the adventure of setting up new African universities, an enterprise to which I will refer back in my conclusion.

This series was Oxford's 'Students Library'. In 1963 I picked up its first title, George Bennett's *Kenya: a Political History*, for 6 shillings! Academics were not too proud then to write short, simple—but learned—books for a student audience, nor did they labour under Research Assessment regime that would have construed such true pedagogical service as an act of departmental disloyalty, to be punished by a cut in the state's funding. The OUP's public-spirited authors were not only Bennett and Margery Perham at Oxford, but also, from Africa, Bolaji Idowu and Fred Welbourn on African Christianity, Merrick Posnansky on the distant past and Philip Whitaker on the relevance of western political theory to African problems. Whitaker was on the extra-mural staff of Makerere University College—like his better known contemporaries in Ghana: Thomas Hodgkin, Dennis Austin and David Kimble—the sort of teaching service that stands in urgent need of revival now.

The enlightenment such people offered was amazing. They brought both African and European audiences into the same historical discourse with, for instance, comparisons between African and European nationalisms or by discussion of classical Greek solutions to contemporary African problems. Plato, so Whitaker argued, was especially relevant to multi-cultural states, for he had believed that 'political society makes differences useful and constructive, rather than a nuisance.' Aristotle, too, thought states facilitated difference and specialisation among political animals, as modern East Africans

---

15 Authors, respectively, of *The Politics of Partnership: The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (1963), *The Rise of the South African Reich* (1964), and *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland* (1965).



were, no less than ancient Greeks. Writing for an increasingly Christian African audience, Whitaker also pulled St Paul into his argument for diversity. Paul, he wrote, 'was most proud of being a Roman citizen, but he was very proud of being a Jew and a Greek. As a Roman, he was able to be all three at the same time;' and Whitaker again drew the Platonic lesson for today: 'The properly-run state gains its strength from the very fact that the people within it are all different. . . Only a wise political system can turn the great tribal and racial differences which exist in East Africa to a good and useful purpose.'<sup>16</sup>

And now? Which Africans can our students now read in cheap editions? Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* is the only recent autobiography that comes to mind. And what has become of the Penguin Specials? Or of the 'Student's Library'? We must be thankful to James Currey for his *African Issues* series: the sole source, as I believe, of moderately priced but unimpeachably expert discussion on contemporary Africa. Perhaps therefore, since few publishers are now interested in Africa, we should be all the more grateful to Geldof and Bono, the Penguin Specials of today.

It is all the more important that younger Africanists should be aware of the precedent set by our predecessors in bringing Africa and Africans to the attention of a western public. Public academic engagement with African issues has a long and intellectually strenuous history. I can give only a brief and insular, *trans-Manche*, glimpse of what we Europeans have to live up to in our own day.

## Our predecessors in hope

The first modern attempt to educate British voters about African issues that I have discovered was in 1929, thirty years before Macleod's alarm, when the Student Christian Movement, based in the Universities, produced an eighty-page booklet, priced at one shilling, on *East Africa in Transition*. This summarised and discussed the 350 pages of a commission of enquiry into the possible 'closer union' of the British territories in Eastern Africa, an issue full of racial dynamite in a part of Africa where white settler interests competed with the principles of 'native trusteeship' at the heart of British policy.<sup>17</sup> So the

---

16 Philip Whitaker, *Political Theory and East African Problems* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press, 1964), quotes from pp. 13, 15, 19. Other series authors were, George Bennett, *Kenya, a Political History* (1963); Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (1964); F B Welbourn, *East African Christian* (1965); Margery Perham, *African Outline* (1966: originally four talks on the BBC in 1965); Merrick Posnansky (ed.), *Prelude to East African History* (1966).

17 *East Africa in Transition: Being an Examination of the Principles of the Report of the Hilton Young Commission* (London: SCM, 1929).

precedents go back a long way, even if one ignores the University support for the anti-slavery movement and, at the outset of the last century, the Congo reform movement.

But nearer to my own theme of the need to listen to Africans as equals, let me instance Professor Malinowski who, in the late 1930s, hoped to educate Europeans, then facing the twin tyrannies of fascism and communism, by presenting to a western readership Jomo Kenyatta's work, *Facing Mount Kenya*. As a displaced Pole himself, Malinowski believed educated Africans experienced the [one, common] 'tragedy of the modern world in an especially acute manner.'<sup>18</sup> Contrast this message with that suggested by the title of the Commission for Africa's report. Malinowski welcomed Kenyatta's views as those of an observant world citizen. The Commission for Africa's report is entitled *Our Common Interest*. Self-interest rules in place of universal tragedy; Africa is no longer a prophetic voice but a common concern. There is much more one could tell of our predecessors of more than half a century ago: Of the international galaxy of scholars—American, Belgian, British, French, German, Italian, Kenyan and South African—who advised Lord Hailey's *African Survey* (1938);<sup>19</sup> of the energy with which they built for the future in founding the universities that would give Africans a voice to which the world would have to pay heed;<sup>20</sup> and of the institutions of civil society that continued to summarise important official reports<sup>21</sup>—but there is no time. Nonetheless, I cannot leave that era of hope for Africa without mentioning Margery Perham, Oxford's University Aunt to generations of British colonial cadets. At the intellectual centre of the empire, she went to great lengths to bring Africans into the circle of a common humanity. To look today at what she did then is to make most of us feel rather small.

---

18 B Malinowski, 'Introduction' to Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), ix. With Bruce Berman I have been working, for too long, on an intellectual biography of Kenyatta and Louis Leakey.

19 See, Helen Tilley, 'Africa as a "Living Laboratory": the African Research Survey and the British Colonial Empire: Consolidating Environmental, Medical, and Anthropological Debates, 1920-1940' (Oxford University DPhil thesis, 2001).

20 Katya Leney, *Decolonisation, Independence, and the Politics of Higher Education in West Africa* (Lewiston NY, Queenston Ont, & London: Mellen Press, 2003) for the origins of the Universities of Legon and Dakar; for East Africa, see Margaret Macpherson, *They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

21 See, for example, The Africa Bureau's fifty-page (3 shillings) *The Future of East Africa* (1955), being a summary of *East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report* (London: Cmd 9475, 1955). The Nairobi Chamber of Commerce signalled its agreement with most of the Report in another fifty-page pamphlet *Examination of the East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report* (Nairobi, 1956).

In 1936, seventy years ago, Perham edited a collection of biographies, *Ten Africans*. It is extraordinary to read her Introduction today: It makes one's hair stand on end to recognise how much she is our contemporary, even when she attributes African anonymity to its easy fit with white racism—something we perhaps neglect in analysing popular perceptions of hopeless Africa today. Britons, she remarked, accepted as normal what was in truth 'the peculiar condition of empire under which we control the destinies of people we do not understand.' The absence of ordinary social relations between the races, 'through which people come to know and like each other', was, she thought, to blame for this misunderstanding. She went on:

The main reason for this is the 'backwardness' of Africans. It is an obvious and fundamental fact, but one upon which *we are apt to lean a little too hard in order to make ourselves comfortable in a difficult situation*. In default of true knowledge we too often make do with assumptions: the primary one, that Africans are backward; next, that they are almost all equally backward; even that they are inherently, and so permanently, backward. Cut off as most of us are from any contact with Africans as individuals, we think of them or deal with them in the mass; . . . We see the strange, stupid or cruel things they do and, ignorant of their motives, forgetting what we ourselves did yesterday, what alas! Christian nations are doing today, think them relatively more stupid and cruel than they are. We allow black skin and negro features to shut Africans off from those perceptions which we turn upon members of our own race. . . . We see semi-naked peasants living in mud huts, satisfying their elementary wants apparently in the most primitive ways. Surely, we think, people living like that cannot have personality as we reckon it! . . . When, here and there, an African differentiates himself from the mass in a way we cannot ignore, he often rouses in us a kind of resentment. *Is this, perhaps, because it is troublesome to adjust towards an individual an attitude which for our convenience or our prestige we habitually turn towards a race?*<sup>22</sup>

To drive her point home, Perham chose the caption 'Individuals and Individualities' for the book's first photograph. Yet this showed three stereotypical Africans squatting on the ground in bangles and blankets.<sup>23</sup> Who among us today could write so simply, so powerfully, so much against the grain of popular perception, sadly so similar now to what it was then, despite all the television, radio, and press reporting that has shown us extraordinary African courage and resilience in the face of suffering, as also the African cruelty that has caused so much of it?

---

22 Margery Perham (ed.), *Ten Africans* (London: Faber & Faber [1936] 1963), Introduction, 9–10. Emphasis added. I have also transposed her remarks about peasants and individual differentiation.

23 *Ibid.*, facing page 16.

Margery Perham carried on the work of introducing individual Africans to the world after the Second World War. In 1946 she found a publisher for and wrote an introduction to Obafemi Awolowo's book, *The Path to Nigerian Freedom*, when he was but a law student. Ten years later she similarly wrote an introduction to the young Tom Mboya's radical pamphlet, *The Kenya Question: An African Answer*, published by the Fabian Colonial Bureau. Ten years later still she even introduced J M Kariuki's shocking memoir of what he had suffered at British hands in *Mau Mau Detainee*.<sup>24</sup> Here was a senior academic, one of the chief public moralists for imperial trusteeship, actively helping to give young Africans a subversive voice at the seat of Empire, and one who could write, privately, that Kenyatta was the sort of person with whom one could speak without condescension, 'man to man'.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars at the time had great faith in human agency—perhaps because willpower seemed so self-evidently decisive during and after the ordeal of world war. Margaret Wrong, secretary of the international committee for Christian literature for Africa, started her book, *Five Points for Africa*—a plea for a new deal for the continent—with the chapter 'We are Men', echoing the question the Quakers had put to the merchants of slavery.<sup>26</sup> Joyce Carey, former colonial official and no friend to African nationalism, was nonetheless passionate in his call for the sort of African freedom that increased personal choice: 'To leave any man in ignorance, sickness, poverty, or racial contempt, without help, is to hold freedom cheap.' His respect for individual agency led Carey to argue, in 1941—when his own country's freedom was in question—but in terms which have as strikingly contemporary a ring as Perham's, that 'Africa, already a vast slum among the nations, is growing poorer every day and cannot save herself. She is sinking deeper into wretchedness, disease, famine, while the world's demands upon responsible governments, the world's conscience, become every day more impatient of excuse.'<sup>27</sup>

Melville Herskovits, a founder of African studies in the United States, was no less eloquent in the cause of African agency, more cultural than individual in his opinion. To him, colonial rulers were wrong to suppose that 'Africans were . . . highly malleable, a people whose destiny it was to be

---

24 All published in London. Other details, in sequence: Faber and Faber, 1947; Fabian Colonial Bureau, 1956; Oxford University Press, 1963.

25 'Notes of 10 ix 39': Rhodes House, Oxford, Perham Papers, MP 451/1.

26 Margaret Wrong, *Five Points for Africa* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1942). In 1940 British churchmen endorsed the five principles laid down by Pope Pius XII in 1937 for proper international relations, namely: abolition of extreme inequality; equal educational opportunity for all; protection of the family; restoration of a sense of vocation to daily work; stewardship of the earth for future generations.

27 Joyce Carey, *The Case for African Freedom* (London: Secker and Warburg, [1941] 1944), 154, 147.

mo[u]lded into the image their tutors delineated for them.' Africans were 'a force in being', no mere 'supplementary resource'. Nationalism thus restored to Africans the creativity of power: 'Culturally, no less than politically, independence made of them free agents.'<sup>28</sup>

How might we in our generation recover a similar sense of purpose and obligation for ourselves and for Europe, in the cause of an African agency that Africa's recent history, no less than the popular mood of today, seems to deny?

## Globalised Apartheid?

What we need, I suggest, is an analogy for what got us angry and active in the past. Would it be too much to compare today's politically and socially divided but economically unified world with the apartheid South Africa of yesterday? The parallels are surely very close. Our immigration and asylum laws operate in ways not greatly different to pass laws. Northern farmers enjoy the same price guarantees and export subsidies that used to protect white settlers from black peasant competitors. To an extent that someone as inexpert as myself can only guess at, that Africa's thirteen per cent of the world's population contributes only two per cent of the world's commerce is due to unfair terms of trade as well to low African productivity.<sup>29</sup> But there is little doubt that international oil companies exploit African resources for very little in return other than the arming of African protectors, like the township police of yesteryear. We recruit skilled African workers in the British and, I believe, other European health services. Their 'social reproduction' costs are borne by poor African states that reap no benefit from their trained manpower, just as black South African migrant labour was reproduced in the Bantustans, more or less cost-free to its white urban employers.

If that analogy is anywhere near accurate, then might not the precedents of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the campaign against British investment in South Africa, which lasted all of twenty years, also be useful? They are certainly precedents that ought to appeal to universities. According to Mike Terry, formerly executive secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, 'anti-apartheid became part of British student culture and economic boycotts an accepted norm'.<sup>30</sup> One can almost hear an approving grunt from the ghost

---

28 Melville J Herskovits, *The Human Factor in Changing Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 9, 343.

29 Cameron Duodu is more certain. See 'We need to form cartels', *The Guardian* (29 June 2005), 21.

30 In interview with Ms Nerys John, 12 January 1999, quoted in *idem*, 'The Campaign against British Bank Involvement in Apartheid South Africa', (MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1999), 41.

of Iain Macleod. AAM also embraced the enthusiasm of the popular music world.<sup>31</sup>

I draw another conclusion, which is that African studies stand in great need of economists and economic historians who might understand how the hidden mysteries of globalisation affect Africa. Three simple thoughts arise, to prompt research into complexity. First, no one can doubt that Africa stands in great need of capital, and the formal relations of production and governance that demand the wider distribution of capital's profits than to its owners alone. By what means capital can thus be 'socialised', whether by foreign direct investment or by African state-, or co-operative, ownership is surely best argued out between Africans. The second thought raises still thornier issues. Is it possible that the precipitate rise of Chinese textile and other exports will make African labour globally redundant, and will thirst for oil and markets make China the newest friend to African dictators? Finally, economists will doubtless never agree on how far the fault for Africa's economic stagnation lies at the door of global structures or the malign local agency of kleptocratic rulers. Hitherto our interpretations of contemporary Africa have paid most heed to changing forms of structural fate. Is it perhaps time for a change?

## Structure and agency in African studies

Africanist scholarship has not always been the most usefully critical friend of Africa. That judgement may be no more than the prejudice of an historian, whose instinct is for stories of human agency--about who did what to whom, to whose advantage and at whose expense. Historians, like anthropologists, tend to be particularists, snappers up of what sociologists, political scientists and economists, all grand generalisers, think to be matters too trifling for their consideration.<sup>32</sup> Nor are historians best placed to criticise our friends in other disciplines, scarcely knowing how to write the history of contemporary Africa ourselves.<sup>33</sup> But if only the professionally sinless were permitted to cast the stones of scholarly criticism we would all be as silent as Africans appear to have been made by Live 8.

When Richard Fardon invited me to give this talk he only half-jokingly supposed that in a single lecture one could not be asked to cover everything you ever needed to know about African studies over their first half-century. I agree. That would be impossible. So let me try it in two or three paragraphs

---

31 A point I owe to Shula Marks.

32 With apologies to Shakespeare's Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* IV, 2.

33 Stephen Ellis, 'Writing histories of contemporary Africa', *Journal of African History* 43 (2002), 1-26.

instead. I shall offend many friends in the attempt. The burden of my complaint is that we ourselves have tended to create successive single Africas in the public mind (insofar as we are read at all) and, moreover, African continents largely empty of the identifiable, awkward, individual Africans that Margery Perham long ago felt made us, or our analyses, uncomfortable.

Our single Africas, I suggest, have been represented in a sequence of three teleologies, or paradigms, of hope or despair in which the individual freedoms that excited a Perham, a Carey, or a Herskovits, have been largely absent. These structuralist teleologies are well enough known to us, which is why a few paragraphs are enough. The first teleology, friendly to African nationalism and the new African nations, was found in the modernisation theory that held sway in the 1950s and 1960s. This translated the socially mobile behaviour that was thought to characterise industrial Atlantic society, with its urban anonymity and capitalist rationality (but without its class struggles), to an almost entirely pre-industrial, largely rural, scarcely capitalist Africa. Not only was this liberal political theory totally disconnected from the parochialisms of African societies,<sup>34</sup> it was also strangely empty of human courage and ingenuity. 'Charisma' was an analytical category rather than a personal quality in someone like Nkrumah. Nationalism, far from being a creative adventure, was a sociological banality, 'the inevitable end product of the impact of Western imperialism and modernity on African societies.'<sup>35</sup>

The second teleology was underdevelopment, modernisation's dark mirror image. This approach had many strands, some more vulgarly Marxist than others. Its partisans could not agree on how far Africa had been exploited by colonial capitalism. Generalising from Ghana, where at the end of British rule three quarters of the population remained self-employed, Kay argued that Africans had not been exploited enough; their labour had not been alienated from their household or artisanal production and driven into more rational, large-scale, agriculture or manufacture.<sup>36</sup> Wallerstein, a disillusioned modernisation theorist on the rebound, argued that very simple forms of primary production in a periphery such as Africa in any case suited the needs of

---

34 Here I agree with Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford & Bloomington: James Currey & Indiana University Press, 1999), 142, re-emphasised in their 'How does *Africa Works* work? Retour sur une lecture hétérodoxe du politique en Afrique noire', in Alessandro Triulzi & M Cristina Ercolessi (eds), *State, Power, and New Political Actors in Postcolonial Africa* (Milano: Fondazione Feltrinelli, Annali Anno Trentottesimo, 2002), 114-19.

35 David E Apter, *The Gold Coast in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), chapter 14; James S Coleman, 'Nationalism in tropical Africa', *American Political Science Review* 48 (1954), 426.

36 Geoffrey Kay, *Development and Underdevelopment: a Marxist Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

industrial capital at the core of the world system.<sup>37</sup> Structurally, Africa had no hope until the socialist world revolution. But no underdevelopmentalist knew how to analyse African social classes and their struggles, a confusion reflected in the common use of the term 'petty bourgeoisie', trendy code for an analytical blind alley. Without well defined classes, it was hard to discover heroes of class struggle, people who might mobilise a capacity to change things, however tight the constraints on their agency. A truncated teleology of paralysed dialectics generated few of the African voices which Perham had given us.<sup>38</sup>

The third teleology goes under the name of neo-patrimonialism, although its scholars, too, disagree on the meaning of the term. In general, however, it signifies a fatal conjuncture between one of the past glories of African history and its modern nemesis. In the past free peasantries practised a creative resilience in self-governing, stateless, frontier societies. Nowadays political elites patronise the same small communities—'tribes'—in order to press their private demands on the state's public goods. Clientelism, bound by personal codes of honour, is no way to build states that obey a rule of law and, without law, states can expect neither investment nor any wide political legitimacy. But strangely, even in analyses of what are quintessentially face-to-face politics it is rare to meet fully rounded political actors, leaders with the personal or political histories that enable us to enter into their own problematic gambles on future survival. There are methodological difficulties of course. African rulers do not welcome intimate enquiries; their private papers are not yet available. Nonetheless there is a curiously mechanical quality to our analyses of the intricately personal politics of neo-patrimonialism. The logic is too inexorable. The spoils systems of 'blackmail states', it is held, first pillage public institutions to feed clients' loyalty, become ever more destruc-

---

37 For his recantation see, Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Modernization: requiescat in pace', chapter 7 in idem, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 132-7.

38 For exceptions to this anonymity of class actors see, in an arbitrary selection: Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), for trade unionist Pobee Biney; Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987) for Chege Kibachia and Tom Mboya, trade unionists too; Kenneth King, *Jua Kali Kenya: Change & Development in an Informal Economy, 1970-95* (London, Nairobi & Athens OH: Currey, EAEP & Ohio University Press, 1996), for self-made entrepreneurs Peter Kagotho and others; David K Leonard, *African Successes: Four Public Managers of Kenyan Rural Development* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) for Simeon Nyachae and other creative officials among the derided bureaucratic bourgeoisie; and above all, for a tragic hero of the petty bourgeoisie, Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (Cape Town & New York: David Philip and Hill & Wang, 1996).



tive as the competition to 'eat' devours the economy so that, finally, warlordism, government by civil war, becomes a fate from which only external intervention can rescue Africa.<sup>39</sup> If salvation lies, as it must, in a politics productive of public goods then it seems that internal African structures must indeed baffle all but heroic external agency, such as one might look for from the man on a white horse. To that logic there are two objections. One is that it invites one to accept what is at best questionable—that international non-governmental agencies can resolve problems of governance when it often appears, to the contrary, that they absolve African governments of the necessity to tackle them.<sup>40</sup> The second is that not all African states have followed the same downward path to its inevitable end. Some have contrived to pull themselves up short of self-destruction.

All three analyses of modern Africa have shared a basic weakness, their lack of historical depth. Without such depth it is difficult to see how African states have developed differently from one another, as they have, over the last half century. Not enough work has yet been done to show how different social histories of, and political arguments within, nationalisms emerged within different sorts of colony, or how such nationalisms then tried to shape different purposes for independence. And there has been too little elaboration of Allen's insight that postcolonial regimes reacted in contrasting ways to their initial crises of governance, their 'crises of clientelism'.<sup>41</sup> Many failed to mend their ways; some placed some curbs on their tendency to self-destruction. This divergence in postcolonial history must have something to do with the exercise of agency by political leaders, or their failure to exercise it. The social sciences seem structurally averse to recognising that contingency.<sup>42</sup> It is no accident that the best brief account of the variety of modern African history rests on a balance between structure and agency: 'Debt was the point at which the global economic environment gave way to African policy decisions as the chief reason for crisis.'<sup>43</sup>

---

39 Again, an arbitrary sample: Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*; Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford and Bloomington: Currey and Indiana University Press, 1999); William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder and London: Rienner, 1998).

40 Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Oxford and Bloomington: Currey and Indiana University Press, 1997).

41 Chris Allen, 'Understanding African Politics', *Review of African Political Economy* 65 (1995), 301-20.

42 See further, John Lonsdale 'Agency in tight corners: narrative and initiative in African history', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13, 1 (2001), 5-16.

43 John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 252-70, quote from p. 253.

## Conclusion: the recovery of African voices

What is to be done? If the globalisation of apartheid gets anywhere near the truth, then global justice must be the goal for our leaders, as I think it was for Iain Macleod, prompted by the fear of what Africans might do were justice denied. But we all know the obstacles in the path of such distributive justice: the protections demanded by producers in the industrialised world; the security priorities of 'the war on terror';<sup>44</sup> popular objections to the immigration of today's huddled masses; the curse of oil and strategic minerals that converts, by a reverse alchemy, the potential gold of capitalism into the certain lead of mafiadom; the looming *tsunami* of Chinese mass production that may turn all Africans, like the black farmworkers of apartheid South Africa, into 'surplus people'. Europeans no longer fear African protest—unless they happen to be Muslim. Conversely, and to repeat, there are few African heroes, allies in development, not least because African states lack so many of the competitive institutional authorities that can, on occasion, call rulers to account.

The G8 will set out its compromises. They will lack the coherence of the *Commission for Africa's* proposals. But what can mere academics do to see that even compromises are honoured? Our only power is to educate imaginations. But that is potentially enormous, both in what we write and in what we advocate. To take first our scholarship. The most powerful goad to action on behalf of justice is surely a popular imagination that Africans are men and women like us, with the will, however constrained by past history, to change their societies for the better.<sup>45</sup> What Africans perhaps most need from us are the biographies that give voice to their reflective, polemical, thoughts. Alexander McCall Smith may have done more for Africa than all the rest of us, with his creation of Mma Precious Ramotswe of Botswana's No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, a woman to keep us spellbound. Certainly, more people will read McCall Smith than, say, J D Y Peel's account of how Yoruba Christians acted with a sense of history as acute as any European's, or John Iliffe's panorama of how a culture of honour has stiffened African agency throughout his-

---

44 For which see Sandra T Barnes, 'Global Flows: Terror, Oil, and Strategic Philanthropy', *African Studies Review* 48, 1 (2005), 1-22; Rita Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear', *Alternatives* 20 (2005), 55-80.

45 To echo not only the Quakers of two centuries ago and Margaret Wrong, but also the title of Terence Ranger's biography of the Revd Thompson Samkange and his family, *Are we not also Men?* (Harare, Cape Town, Portsmouth NH and London: Baobab, Philip, Heinemann and Currey, 1995).

tory, perhaps more so than is prudent for the conduct of modern states.<sup>46</sup> But the historical perspective that makes biography worth writing, namely, the admission that a willed sense of personal purpose may stir up collective action, is beginning to colour our analyses at last—just as it inspired, a century ago, missionary and African Christian translations of instructive Bible stories, with their named heroes and heroines.<sup>47</sup> Even economists have started to tell the stories of African working lives, to show how much market disadvantage is determined by gendered crises.<sup>48</sup>

But Africans, our colleagues especially, need our advocacy as well as our learning. Many will think it unwise, even improper, for scholars to act as advocates. Partisanship surely clouds judgment, threatening the dispassionate attention to unwelcome evidence that alone confers scientific status on the humanities. To that doubt we may give two confident replies. The first is methodological. The medievalist Christopher Cheney long ago upheld, beautifully, the essential intimacy of historical—and other social science—research. Our sources, he wrote, 'like the little children of long ago, only speak when they are spoken to, and they will not talk to strangers.'<sup>49</sup> Students of Africa have no option but to befriend Africans, past and present. They will not otherwise speak to us. Both oral and written sources reveal to their friends, and not to strangers, the local polemical arena, the local arguments, that prompted them to speak out in their own partisan interest. Had they not done so they would not have caught our outsider's attention. Friendship with our sources turns out to be the only method to uncover and weigh the many varieties of contrary evidence. Without passionate commitment there can be no dispassionate research.<sup>50</sup>

The second response, in this case, complements methodological passion with its opposite, professional disinterest. For I want to suggest that we European Africanists concentrate our public energies on demanding that our

---

46 J D Y Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000); John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

47 Derek R Peterson, 'Introduction' to idem, (ed.) Charles Muhoro Kaheri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kaheri* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), translated by Joseph Karikui Muriithi.

48 John Sender, Carlos Oya & Christopher Cramer, 'Women working for wages: Putting flesh on the bones of a rural labour market survey in Mozambique', forthcoming in *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

49 Christopher Cheney, *Medieval Texts and Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8.

50 For other cogent arguments against the myth of value-free research see, Allen Isaacman, 'Legacies of engagement: Scholarship informed by political commitment', *African Studies Review* 46 (2003), 1-41.

governments support the properly funded, properly protected, rebirth of African universities, a matter to which the Commission for Africa paid some, but too little, attention.<sup>51</sup>

There would be many benefits. I will suggest five. The first—and the proof of our disinterest—would be the renewed ability of African scholars, as in the 1960s and 1970s, to challenge the monopoly on what passes for useful Africanist knowledge now held by westerners. Our colleagues would again be our competitors. Western leaders, too, would once again hear African voices to which they would have to pay heed. From this all other benefits follow, if Africans be enabled to reshape their academies and, in those academies, rethink their societies, economies, and politics.

Second, therefore, one might hope that restored African universities would find the energy to rethink Africa's development needs, since previous efforts have been so unsuccessful. Does Africa, for instance, need fewer civil servant graduates and more scientists and technocrats? Calestous Juma, an expatriate Kenyan at Harvard, proposed this at a meeting to discuss how to give effect to the Commission for Africa's recommendations for African higher education.<sup>52</sup> There are already pointers to how higher education might be given a new direction, better adapted to a knowledge-based world economy, provided that institutions enjoy international support, including a global circulation of teaching staff, building on linkages that already exist.<sup>53</sup> At the centre of such academic globalisation must surely be the Atlantic African diaspora of academics and other professionals. To find ways of encouraging Africa's brain drain to become part of Africa's globally circulating brain gain is the key to a more knowledgeable future. Might not a suitably extended Association of Commonwealth Universities take this on as its next task?

Science and technology are essential, but to what social end? What African universities need as much as scientists, thirdly, are moral and political philosophers. The main western pressure group on the G8 went by the collective name 'Make Poverty History'. This is a very modern aspiration, even in Europe, springing from the same eighteenth-century enlightenment that roused the Quakers to demand the abolition of the slave trade. Tom Paine

---

51 *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa* (London: Commission for Africa, 2005), 137-139.

52 Graham Furniss, 'Notes of the [Royal African Society] Meeting about UK Higher Education Responses to the Report of the Commission for Africa, 7 June 2005', privately circulated; Calestous Juma and Lee Yee-Cheong, *Innovation: Applying Knowledge in Development* (London and Sterling VA: Earthscan for the UN Millennium Development Project, 2005). But the Africa Union's Regional Economic Communities will also need a steady supply of civil servants: see David Owen (Lord Owen), 'The Future of West Africa', unpublished, March 2005.

53 Fritz Hahne, Keith Moffatt and Neil Turok, 'AIMS for Africa: The African Institute for Mathematical Sciences', *TWAS Newsletter*, 16 (2004), 65-70.

and Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet were the first to propose that mass poverty could be eradicated rather than merely contained by poor laws and mitigated by charity. Both men were disowned by the revolutions they helped to inspire. And public policy to eradicate poverty had to await a Bismarck in the nineteenth century or a Beveridge in the twentieth.<sup>54</sup> Africans have not yet thought through a similar revolution in public morality for themselves. That is another and, to judge by the European precedent, a distant and difficult aspiration to offer to public thinkers in African universities.

Social reform has little appeal without a robust economy. Fourthly, therefore, reinvigorated African universities will have a related, even more difficult problem to think out: How can self-employed, under-capitalised peasants with penny packets of non-uniform products compete for the supermarket trade with the plantations of Brazil, Australia or Malaysia? BBC Television asked that question in June 2005 with a film that contrasted the poverty of a Ghanaian oil-palm grower and his hoe with the comfort of a Malaysian planter on his tractor. West Africans have paid a heavy price for the success of their peasant exporters in the early colonial period, and their hostility to European-owned plantations. The British doctrine of 'native trusteeship' was too nervous of the turmoil that might accompany capitalist exploitation to act ruthlessly in what hindsight suggests was the longterm interest of post-colonial peoples.<sup>55</sup> A resolute optimism of the peasant will, essential though it be to endure climatic caprice, cannot compete with capitalised production elsewhere. Moreover, global warming is predicted to make African farming still more uncertain.<sup>56</sup>

But again, economics is not enough. Productive effort needs confidence in the future. Nowadays only politics can provide that. And rational bureaucratic politics, held to account by democratic institutions of collective opinion, is the least worst option. Clientelist states with sticky fingers cannot provide confidence for all, only the despairing illusion of safety for the factional few. The final, most difficult and dangerous task for any restored African universities must be to help revivify public spheres of political discourse, against the will of rulers unaccustomed to any authority competitive with their own.

---

54 Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London: Profile, 2005), as reviewed in *Times Literary Supplement* (24 June 2005), 3. For Africans' survival in, mitigation of, and cruelty towards poverty see, John Iliffe, *The African Poor, a History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

55 A G Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longmans, 1973), 210-16. More generally, Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Nairobi, Bloomington and London: EAEP, Indiana University Press, and Currey, 1996), 192.

56 David S G Thomas et al, 'Remobilization of southern African desert dune systems by twenty-first century global warming', *Nature* 435 (June 2005), 1218-21.

American political scientists are even more insistent than we Europeans in demanding the necessary measures of African political reform.<sup>57</sup>

The critical public voices I envisage will need to be protected, to be properly paid, with international standards of information and research infrastructures, within properly 'statish', Weberian, African states. This is a tall order. But what is the alternative? All African states must be encouraged to submit to the self-disciplines undertaken by the few that have avoided the depths of 'clientelist crisis'. African states are already subject to many external conditionalities, each a derogation from sovereignty. That is the price to be paid for the loss of fiscal connection between domestic production and public revenues, the price of surviving, sometimes up to the level of half of a government's revenue, on aid remittances from overseas. So let me suggest another conditionality, one that is as likely as any other to help Africans get off their knees and on to their feet. Is there not a case for insisting on an 'Academic Rights Watch' conducted by some international body, of which the Association of African Universities would be a foundational element? Might that not be a condition for all educational aid? Is this the one simple point that academics might fasten on when considering a goal for our political activism?

But how, finally, might we as Africanists equip ourselves for such public advocacy? In our own national academies we are weak, as disregarded as church mice. Our individual national research assets in Africa are puny. But could we not turn these separate weaknesses into the beginnings of a collective strength? Might not all the European Africanists in AEGIS try to forge, from within our national research funding councils, an 'ever closer union' of our research activity in Africa, a sort of 'politique européenne par le bas' that would be a model for what we all want as much as a new Africa, namely, a Europe of the nations rather than a top-down, Bonapartist Europe of the states? And might we not signal our intent by resurrecting something like the old Oxford 'Student's Library'? And might not its first title be a summary, eighty-page, discussion of the 460 pages of the Commission for Africa, priced at two euros or less? Who among us would volunteer for that task? And who would translate the summary into French? German? Italian? Spanish? Or into Amharic, Swahili, Fulbe or Kikongo?

How many of us, the younger ones especially, will be able to look back, thirty years hence and say, as Basil Davidson said to me in 1998, looking back on his activist journalism of the 1960s when he mixed with so many Africans,

---

57 I am grateful to Richard Joseph, director of the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University, for feeding me with much material. See, especially his 'Institution-Building and Development in Africa', *Global Dialogue* (Sept 2004), and 'Smart Aid for Africa: a statement from the Northwestern University conference on "Aid, Governance and Development in Africa", 12-14<sup>th</sup> May 2005: <http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies>.

man to man: 'The names come faltering back, and the dramas associated with them. . . . and I am repeatedly made grateful to have lived though those tremendous years'?<sup>58</sup> The answer to my question is entirely up to you!

## References

- Abrahamsen, R. 2005: Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear. *Alternatives* 20: 55-80.
- Africa Bureau 1955: *The Future of East Africa*. London: Africa Bureau.
- Allen, C. 1995: Understanding African Politics. *Review of African Political Economy* 65: 301-20.
- Apter, D. E. 1955: *The Gold Coast in Transition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Awolowo, O. 1947: *The Path to Nigerian Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Barnes, S. T. 2005: Global Flows: Terror, Oil, and Strategic Philanthropy. *African Studies Review* 48 (1): 1-22.
- Bayart, J. F. / Ellis, S. / Hibou, B. (1999): *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. Oxford and Bloomington: Currey and Indiana University Press.
- Bennett, G. 1963: *Kenya, a Political History*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Brassens, B. ed. by Saka, P. 1993: *Les Chansons d'abord*. Paris, Librairie Générale Française.
- Bunting, B. 1964: *The Rise of the South African Reich*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Carey, J. (1941) 1944: *The Case for African Freedom*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Chabal, P. / Daloz, J. P. 1999: *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford & Bloomington: James Currey & Indiana University Press.
- Chabal, P. / Daloz, J. P. 2002: How does *Africa Works* work? Retour sur une Lecture Hétérodoxe du Politique en Afrique Noire. In Triulzi, A. / Ercolessi, M. C. (eds), *State, Power, and New Political Actors in Postcolonial Africa*. Milano: Fondazione Feltrinelli, Annali Anno Trentottesimo, 113-129.
- Cheney, C. 1973: *Medieval Texts and Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coleman, J. S. 1954: Nationalism in Tropical Africa. *American Political Science Review* 48: 404-426.
- Commission for Africa. 2005: *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa*. London: Commission for Africa.
- Cooper, F. 1987: *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Davidson, B. 1964: *Old Africa Rediscovered*. London: Gollancz.
- de Waal, A. 1997: *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*. Oxford & Bloomington: Currey & Indiana University Press.
- Duodu, C. 2005: We need to form cartels. *The Guardian*. London: 29 June: 21.
- East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955. 1955: *Report*. London: Cmd 9475.
- Ellis, S. 2002: Writing histories of contemporary Africa. *Journal of African History* 43: 1-26.

---

58 Personal communication, 16 Sept 1998.

- Fisk, R. 2005: Let us rebel against poisonous academics and their preposterous claptrap of exclusion. *The Independent*. London, 14 May: 31.
- Furniss, G. 2005: Notes of the [Royal African Society] Meeting about UK Higher Education Responses to the Report of the Commission for Africa. 7 June. (privately circulated).
- Hahne, F. / Moffatt, K. / Turok, N. 2004: AIMS for Africa: The African Institute for Mathematical Sciences. *TWAS Newsletter* 16: 65-70.
- Halpern, J. 1965: *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hamilton, A. 2005: The G8's Africa initiative has failed already. *The Independent*. London: 30 June: 29.
- Herskovits, M. J. 1962: *The Human Factor in Changing Africa*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hopkins, A. G. 1973: *An Economic History of West Africa*. London: Longmans.
- Idowu, B. 1964: *Towards an Indigenous Church*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Iliffe, J. 1987: *The African Poor, a History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iliffe, J. 1995: *Africans: The History of a Continent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Iliffe, J. 2005: *Honour in African History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Isaacman, I. 2003: Legacies of Engagement: Scholarship Informed by Political Commitment. *African Studies Review* 46: 1-41.
- Jeffries, R. 1978: *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John, N. 1999: The Campaign against British Bank Involvement in Apartheid South Africa. University of Cambridge: MPhil dissertation.
- Joseph, R. 2004: Institution-Building and Development in Africa. *Global Dialogue* 6 (3-4): 73-80.
- Joseph, R. 2005: Smart Aid for Africa: a statement from the Northwestern University conference on "Aid, Governance and Development in Africa". 12-14<sup>th</sup> May: <http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies>.
- Juma, C. / Yee-Cheong, L. 2005: *Innovation: Applying Knowledge in Development*. London & Sterling VA: Earthscan.
- Kariuki, J. M. 1963: *Mau Mau Detainee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kay, G. 1975: *Development and Underdevelopment: a Marxist Analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- Keatley, P. 1963: *The Politics of Partnership: The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kershaw, A. 2005: Africans not included. *The Independent*. London: 4 June: 12-13.
- King, K. 1996: *Jua Kali Kenya: Change & Development in an Informal Economy, 1970-95*. London, Nairobi & Athens OH: Currey, EAEP & Ohio University Press.
- Leney, K. 2003: *Decolonisation, Independence, and the Politics of Higher Education in West Africa*. Lewiston NY, Queenston Ont, & London: Mellen Press.
- Leonard, D. K. 1991: *African Successes: Four Public Managers of Kenyan Rural Development*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press.
- Lewis, J. 2003: "Daddy wouldn't buy me a Mau Mau": The British Popular Press & the Demoralization of Empire. In Atieno Odhiambo, E. S. / Lonsdale, J. (eds.), *Mau*



- Mau and Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration. Oxford, Nairobi & Athens OH: Currey, EAEP & Ohio University Press: 227-50.
- Leys, C. 1996: *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory*. Nairobi, Bloomington & London: EAEP, Indiana University Press, & Currey.
- Long, C. 2005: The Power of Ignorance: the British media and the construction of hopeless Africa, 1964-1994. University of Cambridge MPhil dissertation.
- Lonsdale, J. 2001: Agency in tight corners: narrative and initiative in African history. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 13 (1): 5-16.
- Macpherson, M. 1954: *They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malinowski, B. 1938: Introduction. In: Kenyatta, J. *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*. London: Secker & Warburg: vii-xiv.
- Mboya, T. 1956: *The Kenya Question: An African Answer*. London: Fabian Colonial Bureau, Tract No. 302.
- Moore, J. L. 2003: *Zimbabwe's Fight to the Finish: The Catalyst of the Free Market*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Nairobi Chamber of Commerce 1956: *Examination of the East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report*. Nairobi: Chamber of Commerce.
- Owen, D. A. L. 2005: The Future of West Africa. Unpublished.
- Peel, J. D. Y. 2000: *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Perham, M. (ed.), (1936) 1963: *Ten Africans*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Perham, M. 1966: *African Outline*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, D. R. 2003: 'Introduction' to Peterson, D. R., (ed.) Charles Muhoro Kaheri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kaheri*, translated by Muriithi, J. K. Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Posnansky, M. (ed.) 1966: *Prelude to East African History*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Ranger, T. 1995: *Are we not also Men?* Harare, Cape Town, Portsmouth NH & London: Baobab, Philip, Heinemann & Currey.
- Reno, W. 1998: *Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder & London: Rienner.
- Sender, J. / Oya, C. / Cramer, C. 2006: Women Working for Wages: Putting Flesh on the Bones of a Rural Labour Market Survey in Mozambique. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, forthcoming.
- Stedman Jones, G. 2005: *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate*. London: Profile.
- Student Christian Movement 1929: *East Africa in Transition: Being an Examination of the Principles of the Report of the Hilton Young Commission*. London: SCM.
- Thomas, D. S. G. et al. 2005: Remobilization of southern African desert dune systems by twenty-first century global warming. *Nature* 435: 1218-21.
- Tilley, H. 2001: Africa as a "Living Laboratory": the African Research Survey and the British Colonial Empire: Consolidating Environmental, Medical, and Anthropological Debates, 1920-1940. Oxford University DPhil dissertation.
- van Onselen, C. 1996: *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985*. Cape Town & New York: David Philip and Hill & Wang.
- Wallerstein, I. 1979: Modernization: Requiescat in Pace. In: Wallerstein, I. *The Capitalist World-Economy*. London & New York: Cambridge University Press: 132-37.

- Welbourn, F. B. 1965: *East African Christian*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Whitaker, P. 1964: *Political Theory and East African Problems*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi & Accra: Oxford University Press.
- Wrong, M. 1942: *Five Points for Africa*. London: Edinburgh House Press.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Warum sehen die meisten Europäer 'Afrika' als ein hilfloses Opfer und 'den Westen' als einen Rettungsdienst? Inwieweit sind Afrikanisten für diese Missinterpretation verantwortlich? Wie können wir dafür Sorge tragen, dass EU und G8 auf die Vorschläge der *Commision for Africa* reagieren? Inwieweit können wir auf unsere Vorgänger zurückblicken, um von ihnen zu lernen, wie man nicht Europa dazu drängt 'etwas zu machen', sondern den Afrikanern eine bessere Chance gibt, sich selbst zu helfen? Inwieweit könnten unsere eigenen Analysen der afrikanischen Gesellschaften, Ökonomien und Politiken besser auf die Beantwortung der Fragen ausgerichtet werden, wie afrikanische Kräfte lokale und globale Strukturen von Ungleichheit, Ungerechtigkeit und schlechtes Regieren bekämpfen könnten? Und schlussendlich, wie können wir unseren afrikanischen Akademikerkollegen am besten dabei behilflich sein, dass sie zu Quellen von konstruktiver, interner Kritik werden?

## **Schlagwörter**

*Afrika, Unterentwicklung, Entwicklungspotential, Entwicklungstheorie, Afrikaforschung, Wissenschaftler/ Forscher, Europäer, Fremdbild, Bewusstseinsbildung*

## **Résumé**

Pourquoi la plupart des Européens voient-ils l'Afrique comme une pauvre victime irresponsable, et 'l'Ouest' comme un service de secours ? À quel point les africanistes sont-ils responsables de cette fausse perception ? Comment pouvons-nous veiller à ce que l'UE et le G8 réagissent aux propositions publiées par la *Commision for Africa* ? Dans quelle mesure pouvons-nous tirer des leçons de nos prédécesseurs non pas pour presser l'Europe 'à faire quelque chose', mais pour que les Africains aient la possibilité de s'aider eux-même ? Jusqu'à quel point nos propres analyses des sociétés, économies et politiques africaines peuvent-elles être mieux adaptées pour être à même d'expliquer comment les pouvoirs africains pourraient combattre les structures locales et globales de l'inégalité, de l'iniquité et du mauvais gouvernement ? Et finalement, comment pouvons-nous aider nos collègues africains à devenir des sources de critique interne et constructive ?

**Mots clés**

*Afrique, sous-développement, potentiel de développement, théorie du développement, études africaines, chercheurs/savants, européens, image de l'étranger, prise de conscience*

---

**John Lonsdale's** first teaching job was at the new University College, Dar es Salaam in the mid 1960s where, under Terence Ranger, he was a member of the once-notorious 'Dar school of history'. Since 1967 he has taught African history at the University of Cambridge, as a Fellow and Director of Studies in History at Trinity College. He retired in 2004 as Professor of Modern African History.